

Return to Vienna, 1924-1938

DURING THE LAST FOURTEEN YEARS of his life, Kautsky's active involvement in a socialist, working-class party virtually ceased. By 1924 and his return to the Austrian capital, he was seventy years old. He had devoted nearly all of the previous forty-five years of his life to the most intimate daily contact with the German movement, albeit as an intellectual and not a politician, organizer, or party functionary. But from 1924 on, his concern shifted from German party affairs to highly abstract theorizing, on the one hand, and to criticism of Bolshevik Russia, on the other. In conjunction with the latter, Kautsky devoted a great deal of time to urging the Russian emigré opponents of Bolshevism to abandon their incessant infighting and prepare for the inevitable collapse of the communist order in their homeland. So convinced was he that the communist state in Russia was a historical contradiction that he repeatedly predicted its imminent demise. The indomitable optimism that led him to this conclusion also caused him to maintain the increasingly absurd conviction that the German, Italian, and Austrian fascist movements were only fleeting aberrations. But when he died in October 1938, the world he had hoped to live to see, the world of socialism and human justice, was never further from being realized.

Critique of the Bolsheviks

Kautsky's critique of Bolshevik Russia developed along three main lines in the years after 1919. First, he persisted in his argument that because objective conditions had not been ripe for a socialist revolution in Russia in 1917, the Bolshevik regime simply could not survive. Soviet Russia lacked a firm industrial base; therefore, the exigencies of mod-

ern production would force Lenin to make his peace with the capitalist countries in order to acquire the necessary capital investment and technological improvements. In 1921, he wrote to the Menshevik Irakli Tseretelli that "the complete capitulation of Lenin before the capitalism of western Europe is inevitable." He also contended that for the same reason—the lack of the necessary preconditions for the development of a modern industrial society—the Soviet government would be forced, eventually, to pander to the peasantry or fall. However, he also emphasized that all efforts to secure Russia's economic base had to end in failure because either the massive peasant majority would be pushed to rebellion by the ruthless exploitation necessary to develop industry solely from internal sources, or both the workers and the peasants would rebel against the foreign domination implied by the capital investments that were necessary. One way or another, Kautsky was convinced that the new Soviet state and society were historical abominations that could not long survive.¹

Historical parallel provided Kautsky his second line of anti-Bolshevik critique. Referring to the examples of France during the generation from 1799 to 1830, central Europe for the ten years after 1848–1849, and France from 1871 to 1877, he argued that every period of revolution was followed by a period of counterrevolution. In Russia, the Bolsheviks, once the most radical and ruthless of all the revolutionary parties, had been forced by circumstances to take over "the function of the counterrevolution"; the "white tsarism" of the old order had been replaced by the "red tsarism" of the new. Although he was realistic enough to admit that the "counterrevolutionary" government of the Bolsheviks was both more efficient and more vicious than the tsars' governments had been, in 1923 he very optimistically maintained that modern history had shown that each counterrevolutionary period was shorter than its predecessor and that therefore the reign of the Bolsheviks would not be as long as the counterrevolutionary period following the Paris Commune. That he firmly believed this last notion is doubtful; he made the prediction in a letter intended to help unite the badly split Georgian Menshevik émigré clique. But there is little doubt that he did see the oppressive Bolshevik state as a manifestation of an inevitable counterrevolution; during the 1930s he argued that Bolshevism and Nazism were both counterrevolutionary movements.²

Finally, Kautsky emphasized that Bolshevik Russia would collapse from the sheer weight of its internal contradictions; he rejected any notion of mounting an invasion or even promoting internal unrest by putschist activities, at least until the inevitable collapse was at hand. His

repeated advice to his Menshevik emigré friends was to settle their own disputes and to cooperate with all the forces of opposition, especially the peasantry, in order to ensure the ultimate victory of democratic forces. The state that succeeded Bolshevik rule would have to be a peasant republic, according to Kautsky, but the united social democratic forces of Russia could exercise influence in this new state to ensure fair treatment for the workers and to prepare the transition from peasant capitalism to socialism. In 1929, he went so far as to argue to Theodore Dan that after the collapse of their state, even the Bolsheviks would have to be included in the social democratic coalition.³

Knowing full well that this last suggestion would not win favor with the Mensheviks, Kautsky pressed hard on the issue of sectarianism. First he insisted that despite the errors of the communist leadership, there were "highly valuable elements to be found among the communist workers," and in a Russia numerically dominated by the peasantry, the social democrats would need all the worker support they could muster. Kautsky also lectured Dan on practical politics, arguing that "compromises are necessary in practical politics." Echoing his earlier distinction, he contended that theoretical or propagandistic compromises were not acceptable, but compromises in practice, in the shaping of laws or practical programs, had to be made. Just as in the years before the First World War he had condemned both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks for their petty theoretical and personal disputes, so now Kautsky argued that Russian sectarianism would have to be put aside to save Russia. Twice he referred to the fatal, uncompromising attitude of the German extremists, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, to make his point about the self-destructive potential of narrow sectarianism. He had no illusions about the willingness of the communists to relinquish their domination in Russia, but he argued that in order to take fullest advantage of the inevitable collapse of the Soviet system, the social democrats would have to be prepared to cooperate with the chastened, but still useful communist forces. "A politician must be able to forget," he wrote, especially to forget past theoretical and tactical differences that no longer have practical significance.⁴

The International Socialist Movement

In rather stark contrast to his advice to the Menshevik exiles, Kautsky took an increasingly hard line on the relationship between the Bolsheviks and the international socialist movement. From the last days of the war, he had worked diligently to get the defunct Second

International revived. Early in 1919, representatives from most of the European parties of the old International met in Bern to discuss the prospects of reorganizing an international association. Kautsky was a delegate for the USPD, and Germany was also represented by SPD delegates. At the USPD congress in March 1919, Kautsky delivered a report on the Bern conference in which he claimed that the old International was not entirely dead. He pointed out that only the United States, Serbia, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy were not represented. But he failed to point out that the only socialist party then in power, the Bolsheviks, had boycotted Bern, and he failed to discuss the significance of the absence of the Swiss and the Italians. He also reported that personally he was reserving judgment on the Bolsheviks until more information was available. But in fact, at Bern he had sided with forces which were extremely hostile to the Bolsheviks, although his own speech on Russia was not entirely hostile to Lenin's government. He had urged the Bern conference to recognize the monumental problems facing the new Russian regime even as he supported the implicitly anti-Bolshevik resolution. As on so many other occasions, he failed to take into account the emotional implications of his rational analysis. A strong statement on the desirability of democracy, which was little else than an implied attack on the Bolsheviks, was much less likely to discourage further Allied intervention in Russia, as Kautsky claimed it would, than it was to strengthen the anti-Bolshevik forces. Whatever the merits of democracy over dictatorship, he was being either foolish or disingenuous in failing to perceive the potential impact of such a statement.⁵

Actually Kautsky was willing to accept the Bolsheviks into some reconstituted Second International long after the Bolsheviks had made it very clear that they were not willing to share in any such activities with Kautsky and those whom Lenin labeled "social patriots" and "social chauvinists" because they were not willing to make a clean break with prewar socialism. Despite constant and vituperative personal attacks by the communists, Kautsky was still arguing as late as 1920 that all the Russians had to do to be accepted into a revived International was to stop insisting on splits in national working-class movements and to end their forceful repression of "socialist brother parties." He contended that even parties advocating soviet-style democracy could be tolerated, despite the fact that he had by that time broken with the USPD over its accepting the soviet concept. But by 1920 he had ceased to pull much weight in German socialist circles. Furthermore, the tide of revolutionary excitement had been on the side of the Bolsheviks since late 1917; they, not Kautsky, had the power and prestige to decide who

would be tolerated in a new International and who would not. Kautsky's increasing isolation was made even more obvious by the success of the Third International and the final disappearance of the rump of the Second.⁶

Eventually, a noncommunist, socialist international was organized after the First World War, but Kautsky had very little to do with it. Two meetings, in Bern in December 1920, and in Vienna in February 1921, resulted in the formation of the Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft sozialistischer Parteien. In 1923, the first congress of the new international, the Labour and Socialist International (L.S.I.), which grew out of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft conferences, met in Hamburg. Successive congresses were held in Marseilles (1925), Brussels (1928), and Vienna (1931), with a final conference in Paris in 1933. This International was derisively referred to as the "two-and-a-half" by its opponents, a reference to its rejection of the old Second and also its distance from the new Third. The major parties of the L.S.I. were the Independent Labour Party of Great Britain, the SPD, the Social Democratic Workers' Party of German-Austria, and the French Socialist Party. The USPD had been active in the organization of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft, but the party's vote to affiliate with the Third International at the Halle congress in October 1920 soon reduced the USPD to insignificance. One of the conditions of affiliation was the adoption of the name "communist," and the secession of some 300,000 members to the German Communist Party left the USPD in shambles. It finally dissolved into obscurity. Nonetheless, the L.S.I. had as members parties which at various times ruled alone or in coalition in England, Austria, Germany, and Sweden. It also included the exiled Mensheviks, Georgians, Ukrainians, and other Russian parties. Among the leading figures of the L.S.I. were Friedrich Adler, Emile Vandervelde, Otto Bauer, and Leon Blum.⁷

The L.S.I. was organized because the member parties felt that the Third International was narrowly focused and attempted to impose on the world movement tactics based on the peculiar conditions of Russia. But the L.S.I. and many of its member parties were not unreservedly hostile to the Soviet Union, and on occasion Kautsky's anti-Bolshevism put him at odds with L.S.I. policies. He was on his Georgian trip when the new international was being organized and was an official delegate at only one congress, in Vienna, 1931. But his lack of active participation in L.S.I. affairs and his occasional divergence on policy matters did not prevent his being honored by the new international and its member parties as a major figure of the socialist movement. Friedrich Adler, who was general secretary of the L.S.I., often called upon Kautsky to



Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky, Jr., 1907



From left to right: Eduard Bernstein, Pavel Axelrod, Karl Kautsky, 1922



— Karl Kautsky's last public speaking appearance, Vienna, 1932

attend and speak at commemorative celebrations sponsored by the L.S.I., including the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the First International in 1924 and the fiftieth anniversary of the Wyden congress of the German party in 1930.⁸

The L.S.I. congresses resembled the fraternal pageants of the Second International. The Vienna congress was preceded by the second Arbeitsportsolympiade, a working-class Olympics; on the eve of the congress, 24 July, a concert sponsored by the L.S.I. was held in the Rathausplatz; on the twenty-fifth, the delegates gathered in assembly to honor the athletes who had just finished their competition; and on the twenty-seventh, another concert was held at the Vienna Burggarten. Speakers at the formal sessions dealt with the decline of capitalism, the threat of fascism, and, in particularly heated fashion, with the appropriate response of socialists to these issues. Although he was an official Austrian delegate at this congress and met extensively with other delegates in private, Kautsky did not speak on any of the topics addressed. His most public activity in connection with the congress was a speech in honor of Victor Adler given before the busts of dead Austrian party comrades.⁹

The Materialist Conception of History

As part of the festivities associated with the 1931 congress of the L.S.I., the Austrian socialist Fritz Brügel wrote a brief history of the various worker-socialist internationals. After reviewing the major personalities of the Second International—Adler, Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Luxemburg, Jaurès, Guesde, Turati, Plekhanov, Vandervelde, and others—Brügel referred to Engels and to “Karl Kautsky, who must be named at the head of all others, who further developed the teachings of Karl Marx, and has produced the scientific basis on which the edifice of modern socialism is raised.”¹⁰

In addition to the general impact of Kautsky's life-long devotion to the continuation of Marx's work, Brügel was also alluding to Kautsky's magnum opus, *The Materialist Conception of History*, which had been published in 1927. Kautsky himself referred to this eighteen-hundred-page, two-volume study as “the quintessence of my life's work.” Pavel Axelrod called it “a worthy advancement [*Fortsetzung*] of the theoretical work of Marx-Engels.” Peter Garwy, another Russian exile active in the L.S.I., praised the work also, saying that it would put to rest the “primitive, vulgar materialism of Lenin, Bukharin, etc.” History has, however, passed a much different judgment on *The Materialist Conception*. It is now little read and certainly did nothing to

counter the prestige of the theories associated with the victors in the Russian Revolution. No Kautskyian school of Marxism exists today. Marxism-Leninism is the common starting point for almost all the multitude of doctrinal disputations that still today generate a great deal of heat and very little light.¹¹

Kautsky's intention in *The Materialist Conception of History* was to provide "a systematic and exhaustive" presentation of historical materialism, which he argued was not a mere "empirical theory, . . . but one into which a great world view has been incorporated, with which it stands and falls." This world view was that of the natural sciences. It accepted the absolute reality of the world external to the "I" and the validity of the notion of cause and effect. It held that the basic principle of the history of all living things was that changes in organisms and their organization followed only from changes in the environment, and humans are, like all animals, products of the workings of natural forces. Kautsky emphasized Darwin as one of the major figures in the establishment of this world view, but laid greater stress on the importance of Engels, particularly his *Origins of the Family* and *Anti-Dühring*. This treatment of historical materialism was clearly a product of Kautsky's early fascination with the sweeping biological theories and positivism of the last half of the nineteenth century. As if to prove this connection, he included as part of his magnum opus articles on the natural origins of social instincts in humans and animals which he had written over forty years earlier. *The Materialist Conception* was an effort to make explicit what Lenin once referred to as "the *inseparable* connection between the instinctive materialism of the natural scientists and *philosophical materialism* as a trend known long ago and hundreds of times affirmed by Marx and Engels."¹²

One of the most persistent criticisms of Kautsky's theory has concerned his emphasis on the affinities of Darwinian, evolutionary natural science and Marx's historical materialism. A contemporary Marxist critic, the German Karl Korsch, called Kautsky a bourgeois cryptorevisionist who substituted evolution for the dialectic and thus eliminated the subjective, active component of Marx's theory to focus exclusively on "objective, historical evolution [*Werden*] in nature and society." More recent critics have repeated and expanded on Korsch's line of argument, until the standard view of Kautsky as a positivistic Marxist has been firmly established. The connection in Kautsky's mind between the natural sciences as they developed in the late nineteenth century and Marxism is irrefutable, but the idea that he viewed human society as simply a subdivision of larger natural history and subject to the same developmental laws is false. In *The Materialist Conception of*

History, he specifically and repeatedly denied that the laws of nature and the laws of society are interchangeable.¹³

"The materialist conception of history rests on the one hand on the recognition of the uniformity of events in nature and society, on the other hand it demonstrates the particular of societal development in the generality of world development." "The materialist conception of history means nothing other than the application of [the methods of natural science] to society — naturally with consideration to its peculiarity." According to Kautsky, two things made human societal history distinctly different from natural history: the mode of development and the role of human intellect and will. While natural history is characterized by an evolutionary mode of development, human history is not—for humans, development is dialectical; it occurs as a result of "the conflict of opposites." He specifically contended that his dialectic had more in common with Hegel's than with Engels', because Hegel's dialectic was an exclusively human phenomenon while Engels argued that dialectical development was characteristic of all of nature. When his Russian friend, Theodore Dan, objected to the apparent reduction of the dialectic to insignificance in *The Materialist Conception*, Kautsky responded that it was precisely in the realm of "human society" that he saw the dialectic as operative.¹⁴

Dialectical development in human society was for Kautsky the product of the interaction of human intellect and the environment in which humans live. Marxists differed from Kantian and Hegelian idealists, said Kautsky, because "for us it is never the idea alone, but the reciprocal action between thinking humans and their environment which produces the dialectical process." On the one hand, the human intellect yielded will, moral commitment, the subjective, active component of social development; but on the other hand, and of even greater importance for Kautsky, human intellect was the source of technological change. Virtually the entire second volume of *The Materialist Conception of History* was devoted to a discussion of the impact on human development of the unique ability of humans to manipulate the environment through technology. From the harnessing of fire to the division of labor and the emergence of classes to the formation of states to the rise of modern capitalism, Kautsky emphasized human action as a vital part of the material change that yielded development. By simultaneously insisting on the natural origins of social instincts and the similarities of natural and social development, while at the same time stressing the subjective role of humans in the process of history, he blended the ambiguous legacy of the Marxian notions of will and determinism into a coherent, if not entirely persuasive, world view.¹⁵

One obvious weakness of Kautsky's presentation of the materialist conception of history is its very comprehensiveness. Enlightened observers must preserve a measure of skepticism about any system that purports to present the history of the world and humanity as part of an all-encompassing schema. Particularly historians who have delved into the intricacies of the past and politicians who try to cope with the complexities of the present must balk at sweeping linear explanations. As Kautsky himself once observed, the world is too complicated to be reduced to gross generalizations, and in fact, he was aware of this as an inherent problem of Marxism. At the opening of *The Materialist Conception*, he attempted to clear up one particularly difficult matter by refuting the notion that Marxism was the same thing as economic determinism. "Certainly we see the 'moving force' of history in economics," he wrote. "However it does not drive psychology, but history." He claimed that for Marxists, not economic interests, but economic development was the moving force of history. Furthermore, he argued that the "general law of social development" and the notion of the necessity of social revolution, both of which Marx discovered, were applicable only to the period after the arrival of industrial capitalism. According to Kautsky, Marxists do not seek to explain the humanly universal, but the historically specific. However, his own effort to provide a comprehensive world view belied this conviction.¹⁶

Finally, Kautsky laid claim to something that he had often said did not exist, namely objective truth that was not determined by class. Forgetting his own frequent statements on the relativity and class nature of all political, historical, and intellectual activities, he asserted that as "pure scientific teaching," the materialist conception of history was not bound to the proletariat, though in its practical application it was, presumably because the interests of the proletariat were being served by history. In stark contradiction of his own half-century of struggle for theoretical clarity among German socialists, Kautsky denied that acceptance of the materialist conception of history should be a precondition for membership in social democratic parties. These parties, he wrote in the foreword of *The Materialist Conception*, "must stand openly with all who want to fight the struggle for the freedom of the proletariat, the struggle against all oppression and exploitation, however this desire may be theoretically based, whether materialist or Kantian or Christian or whatever." Unlike the communists, the lesson Kautsky learned from the disasters of world war and the Russian Revolution was not the need for greater discipline and theoretical unity, but the need for a more broadly based, amorphous coalition to counter the rising tide of oppression.¹⁷

Nazism

At no time were the strengths and weaknesses of Kautsky's strongly rationalistic Marxism more obvious than when he attempted to analyze the fascist movements of the interwar years. Of course the fascist phenomenon was difficult for all Marxists to interpret. The qualities and composition of these new mass movements defied the categories of Marxist explanation. For the most part Kautsky's discussion of fascism in general and nazism in particular was not markedly different from that of many other Marxists. He saw the new movements as part of the inevitable despair that follows the apparent failure of revolutions to achieve their ends. This was the same counterrevolutionary argument he had used in 1923 to explain the Bolsheviks. Fascism was a manifestation of antiprogressive, antidemocratic mature capitalism which won popular support from the insecure, unconscious, petit bourgeois and peasant masses. The appeal of dictatorship and militarism was successful, he said, because of a bad peace and the growing world economic crisis. He contended that a good deal of responsibility for the failure of Weimar Germany had to be born by "the democratic victor states" for their harsh, unjust treatment of the conquered German people.¹⁸

All this was both obvious and formalistic, but also not much to the point. The fact of the matter was that Kautsky could not come to grips with fascism because his own rationalism prevented him from understanding the desperation and fear that seized so many people in the aftermath of war and revolution or the threat of revolution. He tended to see the violence and extremism of fascism and communism as an overreliance on will or as pandering to the ignorant and primitive among the masses. As his own brand of reasoned Marxism rapidly lost ground to the more vigorous and militant movements of the right and left, he insisted increasingly on the need for less passion and more calculation. Trying to explain the problems of European social democracy to an American friend in 1935, he wrote; "The position of these people [the extremists] is more favorable than ours. [This is] because we demand from the workers that they learn and think, while they flatter their ignorance and appeal to the most primitive instincts. That got Lenin his successes, then Stalin, Mussolini as well as Hitler."¹⁹

Sympathizers with Kautsky's general theoretical positions tried to convince him that the times demanded more excitement from Marxism than he was offering. Gregory Bienstock, a young Russian exile, argued that right thinking and proper analysis were not enough. "Who in all the world has thought more correctly than we Marxists?" Bienstock asked Kautsky. In an impassioned plea for a Marxism that offered more adventure and daring, and would therefore be more

attractive, Bienstock suggested that "we have promoted all too much science and too little mythology." Bienstock recognized the tenor of his times and sought to adjust Kautsky's Marxism to it.²⁰

Kautsky's response to Bienstock reflected the older man's rationalism and the strength of his conviction. While the first quality may have prevented an effective response to the crisis of the interwar years, when coupled with the second, it yielded a powerful, hopeful message. Kautsky asked Bienstock two penetrating questions: "But how would discussion be possible between science and mythology?" and "What is 'our time'? The last year or the last hundred years?" Obviously, "the sober do not fit into the society of the drunken," but the temporary success of the drunken does not justify the abandonment of reason. "My time will come again," he concluded, "of that I am firmly convinced." Later he restated the same sentiments in more stirring terms:

The victory of Hitlerism for the moment does not in the slightest provide occasion for us to become ruthless in our methods, as we are now frequently urged to become, if by becoming ruthless is meant to become bloodthirsty and unscrupulous. . . . The brown barbarians may arrest us, may throw us into concentration camps, may shoot us "in flight," but they shall not succeed in making us prisoners of their depravity. Under all circumstances we shall remain the champions of democracy and humanity. We reject as senseless and cruel and ruinous to both our cause and our nation the suggestion that we strive to arrive at humanity by the methods of brutality.

The circumstances that made Hitlerism are temporary. The German working class, however, remains basically the same as it was before the world war and will again do its duty when circumstances change and make possible the overthrow of the Hitler regime.²¹

This was in 1934, after little more than a year of Nazi rule in Germany, long before the Anschluss was to drive home the brutality of the Hitler regime to the Kautsky family. But even as things went from bad to worse, Kautsky did not lose his hope that history would prove him right.

Withdrawal from Public Life

Public comment on contemporary political events was a decidedly secondary occupation for Karl Kautsky after 1924. The return to Vienna in that year marked his retirement from active politics, but

hardly from literary labors. Increasing age and nagging ill health did little to reduce the extent of his writing. In the last fourteen years of his life, he wrote and had published over four thousand pages of theoretical and historical study, including a collection of his correspondence with Engels comprising more than four hundred pages. But this productivity did not mean that he appealed to a large audience. Probably the best testimony to his fall from prominence was the fact that he could get the Engels correspondence published only after the Czech socialist party promised to buy 500 copies. On occasion even the very sympathetic Austrian socialist press rejected his articles as politically irrelevant in the troubled 1930s. Attacks on the Bolsheviks found ready outlets and translators, but his major theoretical and historical works from this period have remained untranslated to this day.²²

Kautsky was not entirely forgotten, however, as the curious reaction to his two-volume study of war revealed. Originally planned as a four-part project, only the first and third volumes saw the light of day. The second volume was completed, but the manuscript was lost following the Nazi takeover in Germany in 1933. The first volume, *War and Democracy* (1932), discussed the politics of war in theory and practice from the Reformation to 1848. The second volume to appear, *Socialists and War* (1937), concentrated on socialist attitudes toward war. This work retraced historical ground of the first volume in part one, covered the period from the Crimean War to the Russo-Turkish War in part two and the imperialist period in part three, and closed with a detailed look at socialists and the First World War. These volumes are notable primarily for the strong antiwar sentiments which prevail throughout, and for Kautsky's striking willingness to understand without excusing the dilemma of the German socialists who had to take a stand on war credits in early August 1914.²³

Many postwar, noncommunist European socialists felt that these two volumes by Kautsky merited his nomination for a Nobel peace prize. At the prompting of the Menshevik exile Paul Olberg, fifteen Swedish social democratic parliamentarians, led by Richard Lindstroem and Harald Akerberg, submitted Kautsky's name to the peace prize committee of the Norwegian parliament on 22 January 1938. In the weeks that followed, a considerable number of European socialists, mostly parliamentarians and intellectuals, petitioned the prize committee in Kautsky's favor. A particularly strong French contingent of 154 parliamentary representatives, including Leon Blum, urged that Kautsky be awarded the prize. On 26 January 1938, the official organ of the French socialist party (SFIO), *Le Populaire*, asked its readers to send telegrams of support for Kautsky's nomination. *Le Populaire* and

another French socialist newspaper, *Le Peuple*, both referred to Kautsky as the "doyen de la doctrine marxiste" in expressing their support. An impressive list of Czech, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Yugoslavian, Dutch, Danish, and Austrian socialists, and a few nonsocialists, also promoted Kautsky's candidacy. One past and one future president of Austria, Karl Seitz and Karl Renner, emphasized the universality of Kautsky's antiwar appeal in their letter to the Nobel prize committee. In the end, Kautsky's work was too partisan and his contribution to world peace too limited; the 1938 prize went to the Nansen International Office for Refugees.²⁴

While Kautsky's study of war won the praise of noncommunist socialists, it was sharply attacked by the followers of Leon Trotsky. This extreme reaction and the obsessive concern of communists with Kautsky remain something of a mystery. In 1937, when Kautsky was eighty-three and had little influence in the world socialist movement, when fascism and Stalinism were making a shambles of the revolution Trotsky and his followers sought, when Trotsky himself was in exile, isolated, and harassed, the first number of a new journal of Trotsky's Fourth International, *Der einzige Weg*, still found time to attack Kautsky. Only two books were reviewed in this number, *The Case of Leon Trotsky* and *Socialists and War*. The review of the Kautsky book was little more than a mocking, vituperative slap at "the old master of renegadery," at the "social patriot Kautsky," at "the hoary renegade."²⁵ Of course, Kautsky scraped bare a lot of old wounds in his discussion of the First World War, but even that does not fully explain the reaction of Trotsky's followers. Once again it seems that the sense of betrayal felt by so many who had learned their Marxism from Kautsky compelled this almost ludicrous attack. By giving space and time to such polemics in 1937, the Fourth International revealed its isolation and irrelevance.

Not all of Kautsky's opponents were as obscure and powerless as the followers of the Fourth International. Kautsky was not a major figure in the enormous group attacked by the Nazis as enemies of the Third Reich, but he and his family were jeopardized by the increasing fascist sympathies in Austria during the thirties and by the threat of a German invasion, largely because of Kautsky's politics. Yet like so many others in a similar predicament, family and emotional ties, the problems of leaving home and work, and the persistent belief that "it can't happen here," kept the Kautskys in Austria until after the Anschluss had begun. On 13 March, two days after Nazi troops began their invasion, Karl and Luise left Austria under the auspices of the Czech embassy. A native-born Bohemian, Kautsky was granted protection as a prominent Czech national. After brief stops in Pressburg and Prague, the

Kautskys flew to Amsterdam, where they settled in late March. Karl had begun his memoirs in late 1936, and he continued to work on this project after leaving Austria. On 17 October 1938, advanced cancer of the pancreas, complicated by old age, the disruption of exile again, and years of heavy toil for the cause he dearly loved, brought death to Karl Kautsky. He was one day past his eighty-fourth birthday when he died.²⁶

Other members of the Kautsky family fared even less well after the Anschluss. Only Felix, the eldest son, managed to escape Nazi imprisonment and make his way to Los Angeles. Benedikt ("Bendel"), the youngest and most politically active of the boys, was imprisoned in May 1938. He spent the entire war in various concentration camps, including Buchenwald, where he was in 1945. Karl, Jr., who was a doctor specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, was imprisoned for several months while the Nazis tried to fabricate evidence of a Jewish doctors' conspiracy to exploit Aryan women through abortion. When this failed to yield anything, he was released, and he joined his wife and daughters making their way from Austria to Sweden and eventually to New York. It was dangerous to be a Kautsky in Austria in 1938.²⁷

Luise Kautsky survived her husband by six years. Although friends had arranged for her to leave the continent for England or even the United States, Luise remained in Amsterdam in order to keep in touch with her youngest son, Bendel, while he was imprisoned. For nearly six years, including four in which Holland was occupied by the Germans, Luise lived in Amsterdam. But shortly after her eightieth birthday, in August 1944, she was arrested on a technical violation of identity-card regulations. She was sent to Auschwitz, and for most of the next three months worked in the camp hospital. Bendel was in a different part of the same camp, but they did not meet, though they did manage to communicate by smuggled letters. In early December, the incredible rigors of camp life killed Luise. She died a relatively peaceful death in the midst of great horror and brutality.²⁸

Conclusion

The hurried flight from Vienna and the tragic fate of much of the Kautsky family after 1938 constituted a dramatic end to the paradoxical life of Karl Kautsky. Personally a peaceful, almost passive man, he was for years an outspoken proponent of vigorous antiestablishment activities. And though he had long served what the ruling classes called the "unpatriotic" and "dangerous" Social Democrats, it was only after fifteen years of retirement that his earlier political activities bore

dangerous fruit. With the exception of his brief encounter with the counterrevolutionary troops in January 1919, he experienced no physical persecution or serious threat of persecution until the Nazi invasion of Austria in 1938. A native-born Bohemian Austrian, he was the leading theoretician of German socialism for almost three decades, only to be saved in his twilight years from German aggression by his Czech citizenship. Finally, even though he did more to popularize and standardize Marxism—to create an orthodoxy—than did any other individual, save possibly Friedrich Engels, no major movement anywhere in the world calls itself Kautskyist. The honor and tribute that came after 1919 were based on very general qualities of his work, his anti-Bolshevism, his humanism, and his optimism, rather than on any specific theoretical, political, or organizational contributions he had made to Marxism.

For a number of reasons, the standard criticisms of Kautsky made by both communist and noncommunist critics seem to make a good deal of sense. The communists generally have seen him as deficient in his ability to translate theory into practice. They argue that he was unwilling to accept the logical conclusion of his analysis of modern, capitalist society, and unwilling to insist on vigorous, assertive action by the proletariat to take advantage of the critical point in history, the chaos of World War I, in order to make revolution. Lenin and his successors have pointed to Kautsky's theoretical failures—his refusal to identify capitalism with imperialism; to his personal failures—his "petit bourgeois" aversion to violence that prevented him from pressing for vigorous action in the streets to advance the proletarian cause; and to his tactical failures—above all his rejection of the soviet concept and his insistence on more traditional representative democracy. Communist critics have blended this broad-ranging collection of complaints into a general view that emphasizes two points: Because Kautsky was an armchair revolutionary, because he did not participate directly in the day-to-day struggle, he failed to appreciate the practical demands of the proletarian movement; and because he abandoned, or never fully understood, the dialectical conception of history, he failed to perceive the qualitative gap between the old order and the new.

Noncommunist critics have emphasized different things, although at times the two schools come together. One of the most persistent noncommunist criticisms has been that Kautsky, because he stressed evolutionary development, was fatalistic in his view of the future. This argument concludes that in fact Kautsky was a sort of secret revisionist who really thought the new order would come as a result of gradual, quantitative change, rather than dramatic, short-term revolutionary

change. Other noncommunist critics fault him for his revolutionary rhetoric and for his failure to realize how accurate the revisionist analysis was, finding the source of these errors in his obsession with theory and his lack of contact with grass-roots politics and the trade-union movement. Thus, the communist and noncommunist critics agree that Kautsky was too theoretical and that he clung to a conception of social development that was evolutionary rather than revolutionary and dialectical.

Of course, both lines of criticism have a certain validity. Kautsky's family background, his youthful experiences, the influence of the intellectual currents of the time, did yield a personality more inclined to reflection than action. The mildly alienated atmosphere of the theatrical milieu and the Czech minority status of the Kautsky family were sufficient to make him receptive to the romantic and noble socialism of George Sand. The serious, but somewhat undisciplined intellectualism of the Kautsky home reinforced his interest in theoretical abstraction, and an intrinsic and pragmatic aversion to public politics further oriented him toward theory rather than practice.

While the difficulties of being a socialist and a member of a respectable bourgeois family associating with workers in Austria during the 1870s should not be overlooked, Kautsky's commitment to the movement clearly did not derive from a powerful personal sense of alienation or from personal contact with the hardships of the laboring classes. As a youth he was attracted to socialism because it offered him the chance to satisfy romantic desires to serve the underprivileged and because it provided him a channel for his mildly rebellious reaction to the comfort and complacency of his family. A penchant for the natural sciences also caused him to be powerfully attracted by the strongly scientific overtones of much of socialist theory.

Kautsky also inherited from his family an inclination for work, a diligence, and a serious devotion to occupation that help account for his incredible productivity. His commitment to socialism was neither casual nor frivolous; being a socialist meant working as a socialist, full time. He was not pressed by his family to establish a respectable career, nor were his parents eager to push him out on his own. But the middle-class values of industry and respectability did effect Kautsky's approach to life, if not the content of his theory and politics. Except for two or three years of hardship during the early 1880s, he provided comfortably for himself and his family solely by his own hard work and the support given him and many other intellectuals by the SPD. During his long years of association with working-class socialism, he enjoyed the comforts of a modestly successful, middle-class intellectual. Once

again, the sometimes personally offensive pariah status associated with being a socialist in Wilhelmine Germany should not be overlooked. A generous measure of personal integrity and commitment was required of any middle-class intellectual who chose to associate publicly with the workers' party. But Kautsky did not suffer the poverty and persecution often associated with revolutionaries.

Finally, Kautsky was not a political activist. He was not a party organizer or candidate; he was not a frequent or particularly impressive speaker; he did not participate in trade-unionist activities. He was an intellectual, an editor, and an author. On occasion he worked effectively at party conventions to rally support for his own and party leadership positions, as at the 1891 Erfurt party-program congress and the 1895 Breslau congress at which the party's peasant program was debated. But for the most part he took his lead in political matters from others, including Andreas Scheu, Friedrich Engels, Eduard Bernstein, August Bebel, and Victor Adler. He declined to take active part in politics in part because he realized he lacked the skills of a good politician. But even more importantly, he was convinced that practice would largely take care of itself, while theory required closer attention. Of all of Kautsky's assumptions, this last one was the source of his greatest weakness. He consistently failed to see his theoretical positions translated into effective action because of it, and he consistently failed to perceive that practice tended to be self-perpetuating quite independently of theory.

For almost all of his long career in the German working-class movement, Karl Kautsky was a prominent figure, but he never was a really powerful figure. Largely because he had so little interest in day-to-day political matters, and because he took his lead in politics from others, he was not a major shaper of policy. Certainly he was in frequent and close contact with party leaders, especially Bebel, Singer, Haase, Dietz, Zetkin, Auer, and others, but there is no evidence that these people were swayed by his specific political opinions. Bebel was doubtful of Kautsky's political acumen from the beginning of their close association in the 1880s; Engels had been equally suspicious even before then. The party leadership up to the First World War did not call on Kautsky to contribute to ongoing political debates except in the most general terms. And after the war, he was not a significant force in either the SPD or the USPD.

All of this is not to say, of course, that Kautsky was without influence. At Erfurt in 1891 and again at Breslau in 1895, he was able to stand up against even Bebel and carry the day on important issues. However, most of the time he was simply not part of the effective leadership of

the party. He did not participate regularly in the inner workings of the SPD Reichstag *Fraktion*; he did not sit on either the executive committee or the control commission of the party; he did not plot election strategies; he did not determine editorial policies of the party's daily press. In a party dominated by a massive bureaucracy, Kautsky was not a bureaucrat.

What influence Kautsky did have usually came from his usefulness to SPD policy makers, especially August Bebel. Bebel used him to give intellectual legitimacy to policies derived from the necessities of intraparty and larger German exigencies. But the relationship between Kautsky's theory and Bebel's practice was neither crude nor exploitative; Kautsky was rarely, if ever, manipulated by Bebel. Rather the two men usually cooperated out of shared interests and conviction, but they worked on different levels. Bebel needed the theoretical respectability Kautsky could give; Kautsky gained a forum from which to expound his views. Until Bebel's death in 1913, Kautsky was assured of continued influence in the party hierarchy. Afterward, he found himself increasingly isolated, both because of the changes taking place within the SPD and because he no longer had a special relationship with the party leaders.

At least as far as Kautsky's particular case is concerned, this relationship reveals something important about the role of theory in the German party. The theory of the SPD was far less important as an objective analysis of the inevitable course of human history than as a rationalization of the socioeconomic and political realities of the Wilhelmine state. Kautsky's orthodoxy repeatedly prevailed over Bernstein's revisionism and Luxemburg's radicalism because Bernstein failed to perceive the sense of isolation and exclusiveness prevalent among party members and Luxemburg overrated the willingness of the workers to act aggressively.

Kautsky captured in theory many of the ambiguities of the Second Reich. He may have insisted on an exclusively working-class party because Marx's theory demanded it, but the SPD was receptive to this concept because most of its members felt themselves to be isolated in, and excluded from, the rest of society. Similarly, Kautsky's position prevailed on the so-called peasant question because his theory rationalized the workers' hostility toward, and suspicions of, what they saw as a conservative and backward peasantry. At the same time, by avoiding the vituperative extremism of the radical left, he managed to keep in touch with the majority of party members that recognized the power of the opposition and was willing to bide its time, reinforced by Kautsky's assertion that history was with the socialists so long as they were alert to opportunities but not reckless and overanxious.

If Kautsky's influence within the German party derived from his association with the political leadership of the SPD, his influence within the Second International and the world socialist movement was largely dependent upon his association with the SPD and on the more important role played by theory on the international level. Thus, on the one hand, he spoke with considerable authority in the International because he was assumed to be a spokesman for the largest party in that organization. Some critics of the prominence of the Germans in the Second International, like Jean Jaurès, were acute enough to realize that through Kautsky's theory the peculiar conditions of the Wilhelmine state were being imposed on the entire world movement. On the other hand, the Second International was not an active political organization in the same way that most of its member parties were at home. Therefore, its concerns tended to be less pragmatic and more theoretical. At the congresses of the International, Kautsky was in his element, and he frequently took full advantage of the situation.

Theory was Kautsky's realm, and his fame and historical significance are dependent upon his theoretical contributions. But he was primarily a popularizer of Marxism, not an innovator. He wrote several histories that helped Marxism gain a measure of intellectual stature, but he did not significantly advance the scope or subtlety of historical materialism. He wrote several party programs that helped establish the general outline of Marxian working-class parties before Lenin, but there is no hallmark to identify these programs as uniquely Kautskyian. Not until after the German revolution and the Bolshevik victory in Russia did he clarify the ambiguities of his own theory sufficiently to justify the label "Kautskyism" when he introduced the distinction between the social revolution and the political revolution. But by that time he had lost the party support that would have allowed him to press for changes in organization and tactics in accordance with the newly clarified theory; he had lost the chance to see the formation of a Kautskyian party.

To the extent that critics have dealt with Kautsky's failure to translate theory into practice and with his inability to see the logic of the practice he could not influence, they have been substantially correct in their evaluations. But efforts to find the roots of his practical failures in his theory fall short of the mark. He was never cryptorevisionist because he always insisted that the class struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie could not be overcome by passive reconciliation of conflicting interests and because he always insisted on an exclusively working-class party, at least until the rise of fascism. He was not a fatalist; he was always convinced of the necessity and significance of human action as a determinant in history, although his willingness to push for vigorous

action was restrained by his abhorrence of violence. And finally, Kautsky specifically rejected a natural-scientific, evolutionary mode of development for human social history as early as 1885, held to this position consistently throughout his years as an important figure in the SPD, and reaffirmed it in his 1927 work, *The Materialist Conception of History*.

Much of Kautsky's theory can be viewed as an effort to interpret and balance the thorniest of the ambiguities of Marx's writings, the voluntaristic implications within an apparently deterministic historical analysis. Very early in his career as a Marxist, he rejected as absurd the interpretation of Marxism that held that the specific course of history was determined only by developments in the economic substructure, and that, therefore, the communist society would come regardless of human actions. Much later in his life, he denounced Russian and German communists for presuming that by mere acts of will they could force the pace of history and achieve communism before objective conditions were ripe for it. He sought diligently for a middle ground between the deterministic Scylla and the voluntaristic Charybdis.

In 1899, during the most vigorous debate over revisionism, Kautsky took issue with Bernstein's assertion that Marxism in its Kautskyian guise included a collapse theory, that is, the notion that "a business crisis will usher in the social revolution, or that the proletariat can only conquer political power during a business crisis." Kautsky staunchly denied that he or Marx or Engels ever made such a fatalistic suggestion. While not rejecting the notion of recurrent crisis in capitalistic economics, he argued that to tie the occurrence of the transition from capitalism to socialism to the collapse of the former was one-sided, because "the class struggle remains unmentioned in this description." In other words, he was asserting that despite the historical necessity of recurrent capitalist crisis, a critical part of the process of social revolution was the voluntaristic element implied by the class struggle. The transition from capitalism to socialism would not be automatic, the proletariat had to engage in the class struggle to win power.²⁹

Many years later, Kautsky had occasion to address himself to precisely the same question again. During the great depression of the 1930s, many communists and socialists argued that this event marked the collapse of capitalism and the rise of socialism, but Kautsky disagreed.

But let us assume that capitalism is about to break down. Will it not mean the same thing as the victory of socialism? Unfortunately not. . . .

We must, therefore, guard against interpreting the materialist conception of history in an automatically mechanistic way, as if social development went by itself, being impelled by necessity. Human beings make history, and the course of history is propelled by necessity only to the extent that human beings living under the same conditions and prompted by the same impulses will of necessity react in the same manner.

Marx expected the victory of socialism to come not from the collapse of capitalism; . . . Marx expected it to come as a result of the growing power and maturity of the proletariat.³⁰

His contention at this time, as it had been for decades, was that the new social order would not come mechanically as a product of inevitable development, but only in conjunction with conscious, collective action on the part of the proletariat.

Kautsky was to a great extent also trying to find a balance in the voluntarist-determinist dichotomy when in 1917-1919, he turned his attention to the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He agreed with Lenin and the communists that this dictatorship was the transition period from capitalism to socialism, but he disagreed entirely about its nature. He argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat was a general condition that characterized postrevolutionary society, not a specific form of government. Just as under capitalism the bourgeoisie exercised its dictatorship in various forms—republic, constitutional monarchy, military monarchy, and others—so after the revolution, the proletariat would dominate despite the specific form of government adopted. Furthermore, since even in Germany in 1918 capitalism had not developed sufficiently to eliminate all nonproletarians, Kautsky contended that, in the interests of stability, nonproletarians must continue to have a voice, even within the dictatorship of the proletariat. He was willing to await further development, and even to accelerate this development by speeding up the socialization of certain critical industries. Thus while emphasizing in deterministic terms the fact that Germany, and even more so Russia, was not yet completely ripe for socialism, he argued in favor of certain voluntaristic acts to promote socialism. In addition to limited socialization, he urged that military and bureaucratic strongholds of the old order be neutralized. Although this position obviously fell far short of the more extensive demands of the extreme left, it was not the fatalistic acceptance of an incomplete revolution.

Similar efforts to balance voluntarism and determinism are apparent in the explicit distinction between social and political revolution

which Kautsky first made in 1918–1919. He quite simply argued that since politics was the realm in which conscious human action could shape history, political revolution could be made. He held that political revolution was not so completely dependent upon the historical development of specific objective conditions as to narrowly limit the effective range of conscious activity. He tended, as did many other Marxists, to see the more or less despotic governments of central Europe as historical accidents anyway, so that a political revolution in which the proletariat won access to the channels to power by the establishment of a representative form of government was for him entirely consistent with the determined course of history. Social revolution, on the other hand, dealt with areas that could not so readily be altered by conscious human action, and therefore social revolution would have to await the slower course of the inevitable development of the economic substructure of society. Here Kautsky clearly gave considerable weight to determinism, while not entirely ruling out the influence of voluntarism. But of course, he offered the analysis of social revolution versus political revolution only after the fact. This distinction was only implicit in his pre-1917 work.

The impact of Kautsky's efforts to strike a balance between voluntarism and determinism can be seen in a number of other theoretical positions he took. For instance, because he limited his conception of voluntary action largely to the realm of politics, he stressed the need to raise the consciousness of the workers and the necessity of a mass party. But because he contended that social revolution could not be made, he did not see the need for a highly disciplined, elitist core of revolutionaries to force the revolution to its extreme conclusion in a short period of time. Furthermore, because he was convinced that in the long run historical development would ensure the victory of the proletariat which had access to political power, he was quite willing to tolerate mixed governments of bourgeois and worker representatives. At any rate, he held that to push politics too far beyond socioeconomic developments would only invite bloodshed and, ultimately, failure. For these reasons, he emphasized democracy over discipline, both in party organization and state political form.

No issue more clearly reveals Kautsky's ambiguity on political issues than the matter of democracy and representative government. In his more radical periods, as during the high point of the revisionism debates, he denounced bourgeois parliaments as trickery. As his position during the Millerand affair showed, Kautsky was also opposed to any long-term commitment by socialists to the concept of coalition government. By the same token, he was generally opposed to making

the SPD a truly democratic mass party in that he strenuously opposed expanding the party's appeal beyond the industrial working class. But at the same time, he repeatedly urged the German socialists to engage in political activities that would allow them to take advantage of differences among the nonproletarian portions of the population. For instance, he strongly urged that the SPD use election compromises to try to break the conservative stranglehold on the Prussian Landtag, and he consistently rejected the "one reactionary mass" concept, arguing that socialists had to take advantage of the oppositional elements within the bourgeoisie. In fact, the core of his dispute with Bernstein was not whether nonproletarian opposition should be cooperated with, but whether such forces should be allowed into the SPD. Kautsky was willing to enter into the spirit of parliamentary government, of give-and-take on issues, of campaign coalitions, as long as his party remained staunchly proletarian and as long as it was not irreconcilably compromised by governmental participation.

When the German revolution came, this ambiguity on political questions was forced to a reconciliation. Kautsky advanced three major arguments favoring a democratic, republican government rather than a proletarian, soviet government. First, he rejected the violence and economic dislocation that would have been necessary for the total seizure of power by the proletariat. Second, he developed his distinction between a determined social revolution and a voluntaristic political revolution, arguing that the aim of the latter was to win the proletariat access to political power. And third, he relied on what he saw as the inevitable victory of a majoritarian proletariat to justify accepting less than a complete proletarian revolution. Even though immediate victory was not possible, ultimately history would serve the cause of the proletariat.

These positions point up the outstanding characteristics of Karl Kautsky. His aversion to violence and widespread disruption was based on strongly humanist feelings that rejected the disregard for human life that is a necessary part of an extensive revolution. He came to see "that every bloody struggle . . . in the long run demoralizes its participants, and far from increasing, actually reduces their capacity for constructive effort in the field of production as well as in political life."³¹ This is hardly the conviction of a dogmatic revolutionary, and it contributed to Kautsky's failure to see his ideals realized in his own lifetime. However, it is also a hard sentiment to reject without adopting an attitude of superhuman superiority.

Distinguishing between social and political revolution was part of Kautsky's apparent need to explain and understand all things in

theoretical terms, and coupled with his antipathy to violence and his conviction of future victory, it was an effort to rationalize his moral commitment. Kautsky's exchange with Bienstock in 1934, and the amazement of other correspondents with Kautsky's unfaltering optimism during the 1930s, were examples of the strength of his conviction. He clung to his belief in the future, arguing that like Marx in 1848, most Marxists had correctly foreseen "the direction in which events were moving, but . . . misjudged the rate at which they were moving." Many years earlier Kautsky had asked Adler, "What does life hold if one is not optimistic, if one does not see in the immediate future what will perhaps first be attained by our grandchildren?" The disasters of the twenties and thirties, the rise of communism and Stalin, the conquest of Germany by Hitler's fanaticism, and the depression shook but could not conquer this optimism. Like many others in Europe at the time, he continued to see World War I as a major turning point in history, and also like many others, he began to look outside of a decadent Europe for hope. In 1935, he expressed a slightly desperate, but highly typical wish. "I do not trust much anymore to the labor movement in Europe, on the continent. The war and its consequences have demoralized the whole European society and the workmen are impaired by it. I think the labor movement of the world may yet rise upward out of the crisis when the Anglo-Saxons take the lead. . . . Socialism can't keep its ground anymore without the Americans."³² Like so many other of the noble but less than realistic dreams of Karl Kautsky, this one, too, came to nothing.